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ABSTRACT

To put the interdisciplinary Turko-Danish Fairytale Project, which is concerned with the dynamics of reader response to literature, into a theoretical framework, this paper first describes how modern aesthetics take an interdisciplinary approach and investigate--by cross cultural approaches and in human behavior terms--the phenomenon of art and its place in human life. Some of the major twentieth century schools of literary criticism, including moral evaluation and sociological criticism, are then described. Psychological criticism, with its new insights (more precise language to describe the creative process and psychoanalysis of characters) and archetypal criticism (that asserts the validity of myth and subconscious retention of archetypal patterns in social memory) are cited as the two most promising approaches. Next, the paper cites the reception theory, or "Receptionaesthetic" as significant in that this approach conceives of the text as only one element of the literary work, and focuses on the reader, who is responsible for the process of creating meaning. Finally, current work in the area of structural analysis of the fairy tale itself is identified and it is suggested that Bengt Holbek's reworking of Vladimir Propp's work will provide the Fairytale Project with an efficient methodology. (HTH)

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FAIRYTALE

An Interdisciplinary Turco-Danish Study of the Collective v. the Individual Nature of the Response to Literature

Report No. 4

Title: THE FAIRYTALE PROJECT IN A CONTEXT OF MODERN CRITICISM

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The FAIRYTALE Project in a Context of Modern Criticism

In the Theory of Literature René Wellek poses once again the perrenial question: "How does literature affect its audience?" and points out that the question is "an empirical one, to be answered, if at all, by the appeal to experience; and since we are thinking of literature in the broadest sense, and society in the broadest, the appeal must be made to the experience not of the connoisseur alone but to that of the human race". He goes on to say that "we have scarcely begun to study such questions". The FAIRYTALE project, designed to investigate the dynamics of audience response, is then a modest step in this direction. In the following pages, an attempt will be made to put the present study into a theoretical framework.

Modern aesthetics, taking an interdisciplinary line of approach, investigates the phenomena of art and their place in man's life. The search for an understanding of the nature of reader response constitutes one aspect of the larger question of human behavior and experience directed towards art. One may agree that literary art needs to be understood and appreciated in terms of the aims and the value system of the group in and for which it was produced, but on the other hand experience indicates that certain works have a universal appeal which cuts across cultural and historical lines of demarcation: Taste does vary from person to person, culture to culture and from one period to the other, but it seems obvious that the question of literary appreciation entails constants as well as variables.

Comparative studies in the social and behavioral sciences yield a number of clues relevant to the present study. Of particular interest is the development of cross-culturally equivalent methods for the study of a cultural group's characteristic mode of perceiving its social environment. Results of research have confirmed and put into broader perspective the earlier, more informal findings. It has been observed that consistent responses to stimuli that have some quality in common come about through attitudes, norms, values, ideals and stereotypes that are held in common by a particular cultural group. Analyses of values, studies of stereotypes and role perceptions have yielded similar results. A common language, proximity and similar activities tend to lead to high rates of interaction among members of a group which in turn leads to similar norms, attitudes and role perceptions, hence to similarities in social responses.

Turning from the general question of social responses to the aesthetic response to works of literature, the natural inference is that communication between an author and his audience is possible because there is a certain fund of experience common to both. One may go a step further and assume also the existence of commonly shared values and modes of perception which obtain not only within one cultural group but which span across different cultures. Underlying such an assumption is the psychological approach to aesthetics which tends to favor pancultural laws of human behavior, as opposed to a stricter anthropological approach which takes the view that cultures must basically be understood in their own

terms.

The present study can not avail itself of any ready-made theoretical framework though the history of audience-response investigations goes as far back as Plato's discussion of the impact of poetry on its hearers and Aristotle's concept of catharsis. Yet one must admit that while the issue has often been recognized as a legitimate line of investigation, it has generally not received the requisite critical attention and has not been the subject of many serious empirical studies.

Many critics have assumed that the aesthetic response to works of literature is conditioned by the particular culture of a group at a particular phase of its history and have been, conversely, wary about speculating on either the individualistic or the universal nature of the response. Thus in his essay "Romanticism and Classicism", Thomas E.Hulme asserts that "Just as physically you are not born that abstract entity, man, but the child of particular parents, so you are in matters of literary judgement. Your opinion is almost entirely of the literary history that came just before you, and you are governed by that whatever you may think." T.S.Eliot does admit in "The Modern Mind" the existence of universal and enduring patterns regarding reader-response but is not convinced that it is possible to abstract them: "No two readers, perhaps, will go to poetry with quite the same demands. Amongst all these demands from poetry and responses to it there is always some permanent element in common, just as there are standards of good and bad writing independent of what

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any one of us happens to like and dislike; but every effort to formulate the common element is limited by the limitations of particular men in particular places and at particular times; and these limitations become manifest in the perspective of history". I.A.Richards, on the other hand, is perhaps the first important modern critic to face the issue squarely and to launch an empirical investigation. Richards was deeply interested in the psychology of the response to art. His Practical Criticism records and analyzes the reactions of several readers to different poems, then goes on to discuss the more general problems involved in responding to poetry.

What then are the basic positions taken vis-à-vis the question of reader-response by major 20th century schools of criticism? Those who express the traditional concern for the moral ends of literature and who tend toward moral evaluation have often concerned themselves with the ends of literature as affecting man. Perhaps the most prominent of these so-called neo-Humanists, Irving Babbitt, insists on the duty of the writer and the critic alike to set judicious standards for the reader's moral benefit, while fuming at "the corrupters of the literary conscience" in his essay "Genius and Taste". The implication is, of course, that the reader is a passive and impressionable recipient of ideas set forth in works of literature. Edmund Fuller makes the same point in "The New Compassion in the American Novel" when he states that "ideas have consequences". T.S.Eliot, who can be characterized as a Christian Humanist in the later phase of his career, is even more explicit in his essay "Religion and Literature:" "The fiction that we

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read affects our behavior toward our fellow men, affects our patterns of ourselves. When we read of human beings behaving in certain ways, with the approval of the author, who gives his benediction to this behavior by his attitude towards the result of the behavior arranged by himself, we can be influenced towards behaving in the same way". With regards to such an approach, one can say that the emphasis is on the supposed effects of literature on the reader, and not on the how and the why of the reader's response that this study proposes to investigate.

The same objection holds true for sociological criticism. Starting out from the common sense observation that a work of art is created and exists in a social context, these critics are greatly concerned with understanding the social milieu in which a particular work was produced, with the way in which the artist responds to his milieu and with placing the work in the social atmosphere of its time - on the assumption that an investigation of these complex relationships will deepen the aesthetic response to a work of art. Prominent critics from Q.D.Leavis to George Orwell have explored at length the above mentioned avenues of inquiry, but have failed to delve into the question which this study proposes to investigate. To turn now to the most influential school of contemporary sociological criticism: Marxism is avowedly concerned with the relation between the literary text and economic and social reality. Marxist critics ranging from Christopher Caudwell to Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács have taken an interest in the influence of literary works upon the reader. However

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the Marxist interest in reader-response is in the opposite direction from the one which this study intends to take. The majority of Marxist critics approach the question via the possibility of using art to mould opinions and to develop social consciousness,. Socialist Realism cites among its tenets "the task of ideological remoulding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism". The reader is often viewed as a malleable object whose responses can be fashioned by writers disseminating Marxist truth. The emphasis is thus on how to influence the reader rather than on understanding the nature of the reader's response for its own sake.

Some other modern approaches, however, appear more promising. Among them is psychological criticsm which began with the application of Freud's psychoanalytic methods systematically to an interpretation of literature. Critics have since then studied the subconscious meanings of works of art, the subconscious drives of fictional characters and the subconscious intentions of authors. Several new insights have emerged from psychological criticsm: a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process (as in Kenneth Burke's "Antony on Behalf of the Play", a new biographical method for analyzing the lives of authors as a means of understanding their art (as in Edmund Wilson's The Wound and the Bow) and the use of psychoanalysis to explain characters in fiction (as in Dr.Ernest Jones's famous study of Hamlet). As Burke observes in "Freud and Analysis of Poetry", "In so far as art contains a surrealist ingredient (and all art contains some of this ingredient), psychoanalytic coordinates are required to

explain the logic of its structure". He stresses the importance of the author's biography for the light it throws on his work, and comments on "the psychoanalyst's search for universal patterns of biography". Like many others, he is concerned mainly with the psychology of the artist, and fails to discuss that of his audience. It is possible, however, to continue the search for universal patterns in the same psychological context - focusing instead on the reader. Indeed the psychology of aesthetics has shown some interest in the question of the perception of art and the receiving end of the creative process. However such studies have tended to deal with the plastic and the fine arts rather than with literature.

Two studies on the psychology of reception deserve special mention here as they have a direct bearing on the present study. One is Bruno Bettleheim's discussion of the fairy tale in The Uses of Enchantment. According to Bettleheim, "fairy tales help us work through in imagination our formless, nameless anxieties, our chaotic, angry and even violent fantasies". He views the happy-endings of the tales not as a form of unrealistic, wishful thinking but as "a way of resolving our anxieties". In "Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction", D.W.Harding makes similar claims: "Physical impossibilities may be used, both in fairy tales and in sophisticated fiction, as vehicles for presenting realities of experience". Narratives may give expression to interests and attitudes that are checked or repressed in ordinary social intercourse (such as sexual fantasies); they may,on the other hand, give definition and affirmation to entirely acceptable values. Harding claims

that such narratives give not vicarious but "perfectly real, direct satisfaction" to the reader's desires - but "to a muted and incomplete version of (these) desires". In the process, the desire for affection,... ..., the desire for adventure, for achievement, for the courage of one's convictions, for prestige, for cheerful companionship and for endless other things may all be stimulated... Although these desires, perhaps thwarted in real life, will not be satisfied in drama or fiction,... there may still be a highly important gain in having joined with the novelist or dramatist in the psychological act of giving them statement in a social setting"*. Of interest too are Harding's cautionary remarks about the indiscriminate use of the term 'identification' in studies dealing with the reception of literature. He notes that the term may mean empathy, imitation, admiration or the recognition of similarities** and warns against the use of obfuscating technical jargon.

To conclude: reader-oriented studies making use of psychological insights are not many, but psychology is clearly an indispensible tool for the present study. As A.C.Mace puts it in "Psychology and Aesthetics", "works of art give expression to very primitive impulses, and provide sensuous satisfactions. To use Freudian language, they appeal to the 'Id' as well as to the 'Ego'. Hence the great relevance of 'depth psychology' to aesthetics". One of objectives of the FAIRYTALE project will be to apply the insights and methods of

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* Incidentally, Harding's categories may give us some leads for the formulation of our own questionnaire.

**Another cue for our questionnaire!.

psychology to the question of the reception of literature.

A second approach which may yield valuable insights is the archetypal approach. Archetypal criticism seeks to demonstrate some of the basic cultural patterns which appeal to humanity in a work of art. This mode of approach derives basically from Frazer's study of myth and ritual and Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. It asserts the validity of myth and the subconscious retention of archetypal patterns in the social memory. Archetypal criticism need not necessarily go back to specific ancient myths; it may discover basic cultural patterns which assume a mythic quality over time within a particular culture.

New light has been thrown on myths in the 20th century by developments in the fields of archeology, comparative religion, anthropology and psychology. Finally it was Jung who ignited the spark by showing how the symbolism of ancient legends was echoed in the dreams of his patients. Certain symbols indeed recur in many parts of the world in different periods and seem to have a widespread significance for mankind. They appear in the mythologies of different cultures, and express something of the desires, urges and fears common to men of every age-hence their enduring appeal.

The function of archetypal criticism is to explain this fundamental appeal in works of literature. This method, which has found brilliant practitioners from Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray and Maud Bodkin to Northrop Frye and Leslie Fiedler, is clearly one that

ought to be embraced by those engaged in the study of the collective versus the individual nature of the response to literature. One should naturally recognize the danger entailed by this method - namely a tendency to decode literature into a few myths like rebirth and purification, and thus to reduce any study into an exercise in futility.

The reception theory or Rezeptionsäesthetik, once it is shorn of its verbiage and formidable jargon, is also significant from the point of view of the present study*. The reception theory conceives of the text as only one element of the literary work and focuses on the reader who is responsible for the process of creating meaning. Rezeptionsäesthetik tends to consider the object of literary research not to be the text, but the aesthetic object as defined by the Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský: "The object of aesthetics is not the artefact, but the 'aesthetic object' the expression and correlate of the artefact in the consciousness of the perceiver". This means that the interpretation of the work of art will change in tune with the changes taking place in the social and cultural background against which the text in read.

Reception theorists hold that literary phenomena can be best described in terms of relations - a concept borrowed from structuralism. Thus Hans Günther proposes

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* On Rezeptionsäesthetik, I am largely indebted to Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century, D.W, Fokkema and Elrud Kumre-Ibsch (1977).

that any investigation should take into account not only the individual work but the reader's system of norms as well, and should attempt to view the whole as a relational system of various elements. Günther's idea of dynamic structuralism and related concepts of reception are best summed up in Mukařovský's words: "The work of art manifests itself as a sign in its inner structure, in its relation to reality, and also in its relation to society, to its creator and its recipients".

The work of art is indeterminate, or as Wolfgang Iser puts it, the literary text is open and has potential meaning. In the act of reading, that indeterminacy is replaced by meaning and hence the importance of the reception aspect of aesthetic questions. Hans Robert Jauss agrees with Iser but maintains that limits are placed on the sheer arbitrariness of interpretation by historical conditions and that meanings are legitimized by a reading public. Jauss asserts the presence of supraindividual qualities in the development of the aesthetic conciousness; he also claims that the subjective forms of consciousness belonging to the members of a group have certain patterns in common in their response to a literary text. Jauss and Karl Robert Mandelkov both propose a concept of the horizon of expectations on the reader's part - expectations regarding the period, the work and the author, and also preconceptions of the genre, the forms and themes of earlier well-known works.

The theory of reception lendsitself well to empirical studies. Werner Bauer and his team, taking as their starting point Michael Riffaterre's views on

reader-response but replacing his super or ideal reader with the average reader, have conducted a study on the reception of lyric poetry, taking as their main text Paul Celan's "Fadensonnen" (1972). They stipulated that the process of reception is conditioned by the relation between the text ($Text_1$ or the artefact) and the group of readers' syndrome of expectations at the time of reading, namely their linguistic experience, their experience in dealing with literary texts, and their emotionally and culturally determined individual experiences. The real and potential meanings contained in $Text_1$ provide the reader with diverse (though not unlimited) possibilities of response, leading to the creation of $Text_2$ (the aesthetic object or the metatext, that is the text as interpreted by the individual reader). The readers were given questionnaires, which asked them to free associate and to decide about semantic differentials. The team found out that there were associations which as reception constants remained unchanged across socially and educationally diverse groups, and they identified three main clusters of interpretations. It was observed that the readers' previous acquaintance or lack of acquaintance with the poems hardly played a role as far as these constants were concerned.

Another interesting study was carried out by Manfred Durzak (1971) on Günter Grass's Local Anaesthetic. Durzak compared the reactions of German and American critics to the novel. Having reviewed the attitudes of the two groups towards the same text, he came to the conclusion that the differences observed between the American's and the Germans' perception of the text

reflect differences in cultural traditions and in socio-political presuppositions.

A final word needs to be said concerning the structural analysis of the fairy tale itself. Myths, folk tales and fairy tales have been regarded by structuralists as the prototypes of all narratives, the ancestors of later fictional developments. Claude Lévi-Strauss makes the point that the universality of myth is an important aspect of its heritage, and observes that its value is preserved even through the worst translation. He claims that in myth the structural and syntagmatic side of language dominates and that at this level languages have much in common. These considerations have induced Lévi-Strauss and, before him, Vladimir Propp to concentrate on the structures of myth. The work of Lévi-Strauss does not coincide with the scope of the present study, however Propp's analysis is relevant with regard to the breaking up of the fairy tales into meaningful units for discussion and for the preparation of the questionnaires*.

Propp began with the problem of classifying and organizing fairy tales, and decided that attempts to classify the tales according to motifs result in unsystematic and arbitrary groupings. Working on a body of one hundred Russian fairy tales and trying to distinguish between constant and variable structural elements within them, Propp arrived at the principle that though

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* On Propp, I am indebted to Structuralism in Literature, Robert Scholes (1974).

the personages of a tale are variable, their functions are constant and limited. Propp described function as "an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action", and proposed the following four laws:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.

2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.

3. The sequence of functions is always identical.

4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure.

Comparing the functions of his hundred tales, Propp came to the conclusion that the total number of functions never exceeded thirty-one, and that however many of the thirty-one functions a tale contained, those that it did contain always appeared in the same order. Propp maintained that the functions could be grouped into units. He called the first seven functions as a unit the preparation; then follow units designated as complication, transference, struggle, return and recognition. In addition, Propp listed eight character roles which occur in fairy tales: The villain, the donor or provider, the helper, the princess (or a sought for person) and her father, the dispatcher, the hero (seeker

or victim) and the false hero. One character may play more than one of these roles in a given tale or several characters may play one and the same role.

Though Propp's functions are rather cumbersome, his work is methodologically superior to similar investigations like Lord Raglan's The Hero. Propp sought for the master-form of a group of fairy tales, but he did not continue his search to the point of asking what reaction a given function may have produced in the audience of a tale. However he isolated a structure (for Propp, the unit of structural analysis was the individual tale) which presumably came into being in order to satisfy a common desire for certain formal narrative pleasures.

Bengt Holbek's reworking of Propp's functional analysis into more economical and thematically cohesive metafunctions will provide the present study with an efficient methodology as appears in Report No. 5.

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